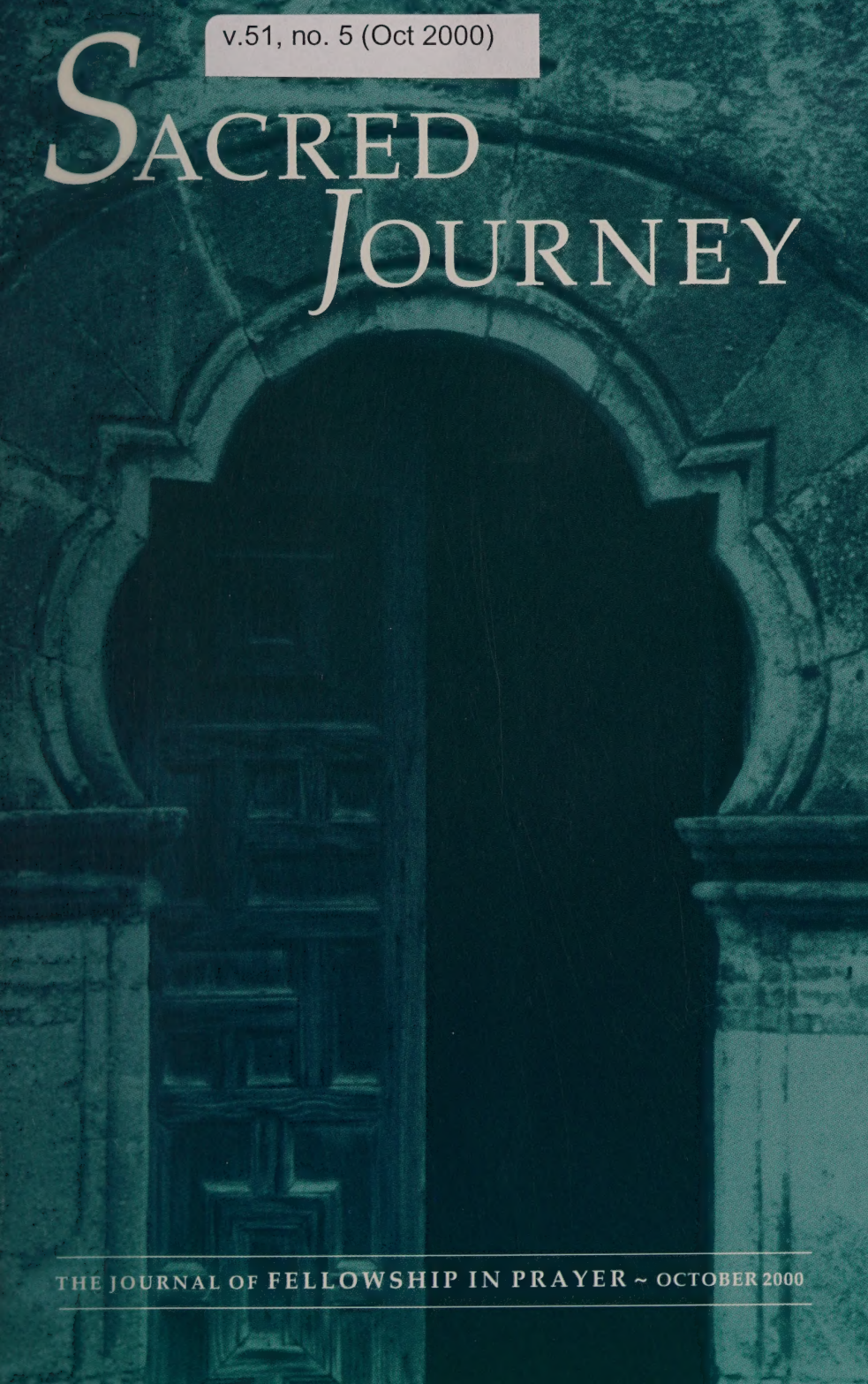
v.51, no. 5 (Oct 2000)

SACRED JOURNEY



THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER ~ OCTOBER 2000

SACRED JOURNEY®

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

The mission of Fellowship in Prayer is

to encourage and support

a spiritual orientation to life,

to promote the practice of

prayer,

meditation,

and service to others,

and to help bring about

a deeper spirit of unity

among humankind.

CONTENTS

Vol. 51, No. 5, October 2000

FROM THE PRESIDENT 2

FROM THE EDITOR 4

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
Not Without My Neighbor
S. Wesley Ariarajah 7

ILLUMINATIONS 15

SPIRITUALITY & HEALING
Mindfulness over Migraines
Mercedes Rojo 17

POETRY 23

A TRANSFORMING EXPERIENCE
A Sacred Juxtaposition
Joseph A. Burkart 26

ON REMAINING THE SAME
Mary K. Vineyard 30

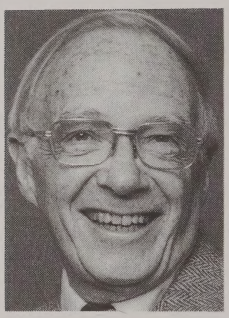
THE WAYS OF PRAYER
The Way of the Snow Leopard
Elizabeth M. Racicot 34

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE
Sabbath As An Act of Resistance
Lee Van Ham 39

PRAYERS 44

Cover photo by Sara Wuthnow taken at Mission Espada, San Antonio, TX.

FROM THE PRESIDENT



As I flounder around, trying to clear up my office in preparation for a journey, part pure vacation, part pilgrimage to sacred sites in Wales and Ireland, I've been thinking about what people said to me at the end of our recent "Companions on the Sacred Journey" conference in Princeton.

"Wonderful! Do it again!" "Don't wait another 50 years!" they said. "It was a life-changing experience for me." "It's very rare to be able to share and talk, at a deep level, with so many people who are also interested in a spiritual life–regardless of their religion or beliefs about God." "At heart, everyone I talked with believed that however we are different, our basic nature is kind and loving, and that God–or the ultimate Source of our being–wants us to treat all people, everywhere, with loving kindness."

"Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could get together like this, with all different kinds of people in our own communities, to talk and pray together like we did in the workshops, prayer circles, and gathering spaces of Princeton!"

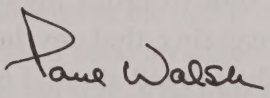
With so many women and men saying those things, it was clear that a deep need was being met at the "Companions on the Sacred Journey" conference. People

felt liberated from the belief that they shouldn't talk about their prayer life. They valued hearing about the scientifically proven effectiveness of prayer from Dr. Larry Dossey, and learning about the many different ways to pray and come into closer contact with the divine source of our being from Ann Ulanov. They shared with each other the endless richness and ability of prayer to sharpen our awareness of the constant presence of a loving God, and to express their gratitude, their joys and sorrows, their hopes and fears.

"Wouldn't it be wonderful," people said to me, "if we could gather, on a regular basis, with all the different kinds of people in our community, and pray for our mutual healing and the healing of the world?"

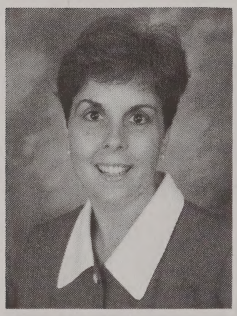
That would be wonderful, wouldn't it? I'll be thinking about how that might be done as we start now to plan for the next "Companions on the Sacred Journey" conference in 2002. Any ideas?

Meanwhile, enjoy your sacred journey!



Paul Walsh

FROM THE EDITOR



I first attended Catholic mass as a teenager. My friend, Cathi, came regularly to my conservative Protestant church's youth group functions after Friday night football games. Soon, she asked me to come to mass with her. Our churches were separated by two short blocks, but the distance was really centuries wide. The crucifix startled me–the cross above the pulpit in my church hung empty under bright lights–but this one held the sorrowful form of the crucified Christ in a candlelit alcove. She knelt and I played a self-conscious form of follow the leader. When the time came to cross myself, I quickly switched hands after realizing that my left-handedness wasn't correct. When she prayed aloud, I mouthed silently, praying I didn't look as out of place as I felt. She walked down the aisle to receive Eucharist, and I stayed back. I wasn't Catholic, this meal wasn't meant for me.

Years later, in Berkeley, a friend asked me to go to the Zen Center. I reluctantly followed him into a bare room and repeatedly tipped off my cushion discovering my short, sturdy legs are better suited to wide, wooden pews. As uncomfortable as the sitting was, the silence scared me. Never in my life had I allowed my chattering monkey-mind such freedom. Where could I run to? What

might I do to silence these thoughts?

A wedding opened the doors of the synagogue to me. Matt sat at the desk across from me as we labored as the young editorial drones of a publishing company. He would look at me amazed when I gave my opinions on the Protestant books that were my purview, and I looked at him with equal wonder when he lapsed into Jewish-speak that I did not understand. When he married, I discovered his synagogue was only four blocks from my apartment. Soon I took a business trip to Philadelphia where his mother, a mainline matron, told me that welcoming me into her home was a simple mitzvah, her religiously motivated good deed.

On a trip to Singapore, I first peeked into a mosque but never dared enter. A decade later, by prearrangement, I walked inside assured by my host that prayers were not being said. When the imam entered and the call to prayer sounded, I was shown the door. This was a private prayer time, I was a Christian and a woman, this was not my spiritual home. In Calcutta, I walked inside a Hindu temple where the garish colors and movement baffled me. When did worship start and end? I felt a total stranger.

Seeking to glimpse the sacred wherever it may be found long has been a part of my life. Home is easier, but meeting my neighbors helps me widen my sense of community and appreciate my own spiritual history.

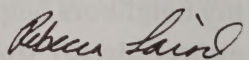
In this month's *Questions & Answers* feature, Wesley Ariarajah perceptively addresses key issues that arise in interfaith relationships. Tony Burkart, in *A Transforming Experience,* finds a Buddhist insight humorously worms into his everyday life. Mercedes Rojo witnesses to the benefits of mindfulness in *Spirituality & Healing*, and Mary K. Vineyard discovers how permanently we are all marked

by the divine stamp in "On Remaining the Same." In *The Ways of Prayer,* Elizabeth Racicot traces a wild and mysterious image for the spirit. Lee Van Ham describes the importance of taking sabbath time to renew and reorient our lives.

Recently, I attended a conference where we sang a hymn as familiar to me as my mother's voice. Tears filled my eyes. These words hadn't formed on my tongue for years, but they were still written on my heart. I was surprised at my response since I am not the kid I once was. My spiritual history is marked by many insights and practices that I did not learn at home. I now know the mass and sometimes enter in. I try to offer my own mitzvah for God through my fellow creatures. In meditation I occasionally find a span of silence. When I car pool with my Hindu neighbors, we talk about temple and church. And yet, few things can move me the way those old songs that I've known all along. Funny the sacred ways of God.

This month, it is my prayer that you find ways to bow in love to your neighbors and find a glimpse of God housed in your neighbor's soul.

Blessings,



Rebecca Laird

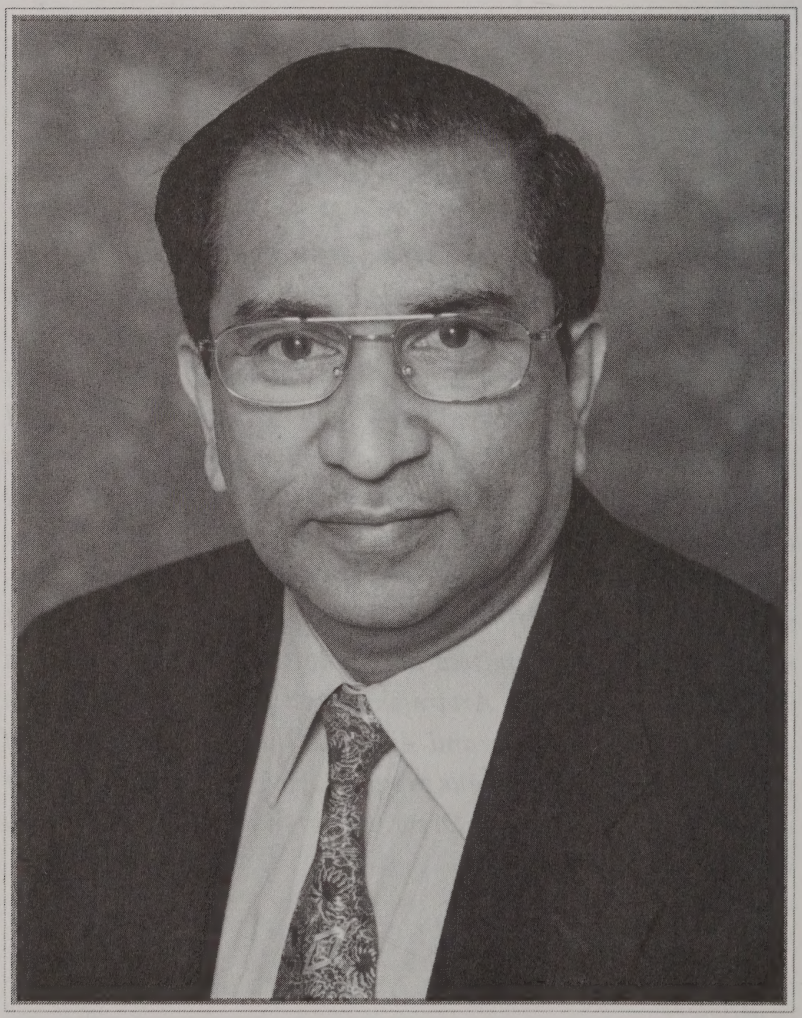
QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Not Without My Neighbor

S. Wesley Ariarajah

Wesley Ariarajah was born in Sri Lanka to Protestant parents. His closest neighbors and friends were devout Hindus. Some days his Hindu friends attended his family's evening prayers. Other evenings, he was at the neighbor's home when they said their prayers and sang their teravams, *devotional songs. Living his early life in close contact with a family who practiced a different religion but whose lives were so clearly ethical and meaningful, made him wrestle with the question of how to claim his own faith while embracing his neighbors who sought God differently. Wesley became a Methodist minister who has committed his life to the study of Hinduism and Buddhism. Wesley Ariarajah served parishes in Sri Lanka and the United States and directed the World Council of Churches interfaith dialogue program. He is currently professor of ecumenical theology at Drew University School of Theology in Madison, New Jersey.*

S. Wesley Ariarajah



Shelley Kusnetz

Sacred Journey: What did twelve years as the director of the World Council of Churches program on interfaith dialogue teach you about relationships that cross faith lines?

Wesley Ariarajah: First, I would say that interfaith dialogue is a conversation of commitments. We need to have something to say as people deeply rooted in our own traditions, and we need to open our ears to hear those who are speaking from different but equally rooted points of view. Unfortunately, people often begin interfaith dialogue as a result of a crisis. Perhaps two groups have clashed or violence has broken out. While these efforts must be made, the purpose of interfaith conversations is not ultimately conflict resolution. It is about building a 'community of conversation' or a 'community of heart and mind' across racial, ethnic, and religious barriers. The goal of dialogue is to help us to understand and accept our 'otherness' and to help us begin to feel at home with those who differ from us. As we get to know each other, we create human links that help hold the community together both in times of peace and when the whole community is threatened by forces of separation or anarchy.

Can we move beyond dialogue and pray and worship together? What must be considered before issuing invitations and throwing open the doors?

Hospitality is key to worshiping together. I have often been asked to address Hindu festivals held during the Christmas and Easter seasons and have talked about the significance of these moments in Christ's life for Christians and my words have been completely welcomed. But as a Methodist pastor, I was often unable to return the

hospitality and ask the Hindu leader to come into my church and give a talk on the significance of *Deepavali*, *Sivarathiri* or *Krishna Jeyanthi* in a Christian worship service. I could organize talks about national events or world peace but not about Hindu spiritual practice and belief. Unless all concerned are committed to practicing hospitality and doing all they can to make another feel welcomed and free to be themselves, interfaith worship can quickly be reduced to polite words and watered-down prayers.

What would praying together in a context of mutual hospitality be like?

First, let me define what I see as a difference between prayer and worship. Prayer is a universal experience. Anthropologists say that all human beings in all eras have practiced prayer. The mystery that surrounds us propels us to be in communion or communication with the sacred. Not all people consciously engage in an active prayer life, yet it is an inalienable part of human life to assume an inner posture of prayer, especially when the human heart is elevated by the mysteries of life or confronted with the reality of death.

Worship, on the other hand, is usually an ordered response to a realized experience of the sacred. Worship is usually a communal rather than an individual activity among people who have a shared story. In worship, a community celebrates the central event that creates their religious identity. To the Jews, it is the revelation of the Torah on Mount Sinai, to the Muslims, the revelation of the Quran, to the Christians, the revelation in Jesus Christ, to the Hindus, what the seers saw in the Vedas and so on.

Worship isn't as open-ended as prayer; it is built upon shared stories, accepted rites and rituals. Consequently, worship is often only meaningful to those who share the story and understand the traditions and rituals. Others find the experience confusing or meaningless. Each tradition has a private space where those of other religions will feel out of place. Distinguishing between what is private or internal to a faith community and what is mutual and universal is a first step in determining what we can fully share together in interfaith worship.

Many people today incorporate the spiritual practices of various faith traditions into their lives. How does this come to bear on interfaith understanding?

There has been an interfaith "dialogue of spirituality" going on for some time that has not been initiated by any church or religious institution. Christians have turned to Buddhism to learn to meditate and temper the Christian dependence on the spoken word. Many others from the West have incorporated Eastern forms of spiritual practice out of a sense that something was missing from church life or when in need of deepening guidance. Most of these experiments in spiritual practice opened the windows to reveal the spiritual treasures of different traditions. Often those who explore outside of their own tradition eventually reclaim their original faith with fresh eyes.

Can you give me an example of how an encounter with a person of another faith tradition enriched your perspective?

Once in Colombo, I was walking along with a Hindu friend on a Friday. We passed a Hindu temple and my friend asked me if I could wait five minutes while he went inside the temple to worship. I looked at magazines at a stand near the temple. He soon returned and we resumed our conversation.

I wondered how he could have completed his worship so quickly. We talked about what he had done. As one enters a temple at the time of the *puja*, one is met by the aroma of camphor and incense burned in front of the deity. One's eyes are filled with images from religious sculpture and paintings that are garlanded with flowers. One's ears ring with the sound of a mantra, a repeated phrase, and the sounds of bells and drums. The priest brings to those gathered the *prasad*, a mixture of milk, water, and fruit, from the altar. Once one has received and has seen and been seen by the deity in *darshan*, a holy gaze, one prostrates oneself upon the ground invoking the name of the deity of the temple. Then one is free to leave. Through thousands of years, Hindus have developed a spiritual practice that caters to all the senses at once with intensity to bring the devotee to an awareness of standing in the presence of God.

My friend was impressed with my curiosity and observations about his worship and asked if he could attend the next Sunday service at my church. I was nervous knowing that our worship took place in a plain building with a bare altar table, one vase of flowers, and lasted over an hour. I realized our whole service catered to the sense of hearing–singing, speaking, reading. At the end of the service I greeted my Hindu friend who was deeply excited. He thought our worship was wonderful. The common intention our congregation shared moved

him. In his temple he realized each person comes and leaves individually and that in our Christian worship several hundred of us gathered together to worship, pray, and learn together. He also was impressed by our intercessions–how we prayed for others by name and prayed for peace, justice, and the needs of the world.

This was a revealing experience for me. I, a Methodist minister, learned from a Hindu temple about the importance of engaging all the senses in worship and he, a Hindu, learned from a Christian church of the power of corporate intention and prayer. As Diana Eck, professor of comparative religion at Harvard, says, "We not only need to know the others; we also need the others to know ourselves." When we look at ourselves through another's eyes, we see things we have never noticed before.

What impact do you see this "dialogue of spirituality" having in the future?

It appears to me that a new approach to worship will be demanded within all religious traditions. Imagine three concentric circles. The inner circle represents the core of liturgical life in which each community celebrates it's particular story or event. For Christians this is the Eucharist when Christians share what God has done in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. A community might decide to be hospitable and invite people of other faiths to be present at a Eucharist but would need to allow others to participate to the extent that they feel able.

When I took a seminary class to a Hindu temple in Bridgewater, New Jersey, the priest saw us and offered us the *prasad*. I told my students I would receive his gift just as I would accept food prepared by a host when I visited

his house. But I told them if they felt they could not receive this gift, they were free to refuse as well. We need to recognize our rituals and allow ourselves and others to hold fast to theirs as well.

Beyond the inner core of liturgical life there is a sphere of what I term the "commonwealth of spirituality." These are the spiritual resources and practices of various traditions that can be utilized to enlarge one's spiritual vistas and understanding. Unfortunately, many religious communities are reluctant to touch the practices of another tradition based on prejudice and fear rather than theological reflection. Considering the scriptures of another tradition doesn't lead to syncretism but rather to a more multifaceted understanding of one's own faith. Syncretism has to do with what one does with these resources and what one does with one's own faith in embracing them. Religions are not fortresses to be defended; they are springs for the nourishment of life.

The third circle is the arena of worship in an interfaith context. Here we can both celebrate the distinct narratives that provide identity for our individual faith communities and begin to create meta-narratives that incorporate us all. This is not an attempt to create a universal religion, rather it is the recognition of our common humanity. We are in uncharted territory here as we seek to sense in a new way who we are all together as God's people.

S. Wesley Ariarajah's book, Not Without My Neighbor: Issues in Interfaith Relations, *is available through WCC Publications, World Council of Churches, 150 route de Ferney, 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland or on the internet at www.wcc-coe.org .*

When you lose the rhythm of the drumbeat of God, you are lost from the peace and rhythm of life.

~Saying of the Cheyenne tribe

There is a really deep well inside of me. And in it dwells God. Sometimes I am there, too. But more often stones and grit block the well, and God is buried beneath. Then he must be dug out again.

~Etty Hillesum, *An Interrupted Life*

Even if all you can say to God is "Help!" it is still very good. Repeat this over and over again, until God opens your lips and the words begin to flow from your heart.

~Rebbe Nachman of Breslov,
The Empty Chair

Do not run toward pain, but do not run from it either. Pain is your guide. Pain is what guides a person in every serious undertaking. Unless an aching longing and passion arises in someone to get or achieve something, he will never get or achieve it.

~Andrew Harvey, *Light from Light, Inspirations from Rumi*

One day Mara, the Buddhist God of ignorance and evil, was traveling through the villages of India with his attendants. He saw a man doing walking meditation whose

face was lit up in wonder. The man had just discovered something on the ground in front of him. Mara's attendants asked what that was and Mara replied, "A piece of truth." "Doesn't this bother you when someone finds a piece of the truth, O evil one" his attendants asked. "No," Mara replied. "Right after this they usually make a belief out of it."

~Jack Kornfield and Christina Feldman
Soul Food, Stories to Nourish the Spirit & Heart

The more we take the welfare of others to heart and work for their benefit, the more benefit we derive for ourselves. This is a fact we can see.

And the more selfish we remain and self-centered, the more selfish our way of life is, the lonelier we feel and the more miserable. This is also a fact we can see.

~Tenzin Gyatso, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama

If while making a vocal prayer, you feel yourself drawn and invited to interior or mental prayer, do not refuse to go to it.

~Francois de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*

Accustom yourself gradually to let your mental prayer spread over all your daily external occupations. Speak, act, work quietly, as though you were praying, as indeed you ought to be.

~Francois Fenelon, *Spiritual Letters*

Mindfulness Over Migraines

Mercedes Rojo

How do you pray when you are too tired to even think, too stressed out to be still, or too sick to try? How do you pray when your body does not cooperate with the desire of your heart? These and similar questions are asked of me often by men and women desirous of keeping their relationship with God alive in difficult times. I do not have a magic answer that may work for every one, so what I do is share with them my own experience and the different ways that I have found successful in similar situations. In this article I will like to share a difficult experience in my life and a method of prayer that was very helpful to me. I offer it in the hope that it may be of help in your own prayer journey.

Prayer of Mindfulness

Several years ago I suffered from what my doctor later called a "marathon migraine." Anyone who has suffered from

Sr. Mercedes Rojo, OSF, is a spiritual director and retreat facilitator. She lectures and writes on prayer and spirituality and is currently a member of the renewal and evangelization team of the Philadelphia archdiocese.

migraine headaches knows how your whole body—not just your head—is affected by it. The pain is excruciating, the vision not clear, the mind a blank, and your whole body refuses to respond to the most routine tasks. I had suffered from migraines for many years and had learned to work through most of them. This time, however, the headache persisted for days and weeks—eight weeks total. My doctor tried every medicine possible without success. Throughout this time I found that I could not pray in my usual ways even though I wanted to very much. I desperately needed God's help to deal with what this time of illness was asking of me. I am by nature an active, energetic person and this illness was keeping me for long periods closed in a dark and silent room where light or sound were not allowed to enter. Having taught so many people how to pray I found myself unable to do it myself. I was like a new baby who has to learn everything. One dark afternoon, frustrated by the pain and in great need to feel God's presence, I begged God to help me, to be with me, to give me peace. It was then that I remembered the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh, the Buddhist monk whose books had been such a source of insight for me in the past. To someone who usually does things very fast and with so much energy, Thich Nhat Hanh's teachings on mindfulness had been very challenging. Now his words came back to me as the answer to my need for God in my forced stillness. In his book *Being Peace*, he gives the reader a short poem as a reminder of the basic steps to mindfulness:

> Breathing in, I calm my body.
> Breathing out, I smile.
> Dwelling in the present moment
> I know this is a wonderful moment.

And so my mindfulness prayer began to take shape. I started by focusing mainly on breathing and dwelling in the present moment. The smiling part of Thich Nhat Hanh's formula was not easy. I could not call my experience a "wonderful moment" and so, I did not even try to work at it. Instead, I soon found out that the prayer worked just as well with the first and third steps. Despite the pain, I understood that it was important for me to be fully present to this moment and this illness, for this was the only moment I had. Here was God's grace for me and nowhere else. The following words from Thich Nhat Hanh were truly a gift to me and God's answer to my prayer.

> While I sit here, I don't think of somewhere else, of the future or the past. I sit here, and I know where I am . . . Now is the moment to be alive. We may never be alive at all in our entire life. Therefore, the technique, if we have to speak of a technique, is to be in the present moment, to be aware that we are here and now, and the only moment to be alive is the present moment.

As strange as it may seem, focusing in the present moment was not difficult at all, in fact, it was really the only thing I could do well as the pain was so pervasive, it was impossible to ignore it. The difference now was that focusing on my pain had a different quality. I did not try to fight it, or wish it would be gone. Rather, I tried to stay with it peacefully and mindfully with the awareness that this was the holy ground where God's saving and healing grace was to be found for me.

Throughout those long weeks my mindfulness prayer began to take a shape very much my own. I would begin by

breathing slowly in and out, in and out, conscious of God's presence in me, but without making any effort or using any words, but just being attentive to my breathing. The breathing itself was a sacrament of God's presence in me; of God's gift of life to me. As I breathed slowly, I tried to be mindful of the one part of my body I could not ignore: the pain that began in my left eye and radiated throughout my whole body. Focused on this pain, I continued to breathe in and out, this simple mindfulness connecting me to my God.

Someone asked me one day after I shared this experience, how did I know that this simple mindfulness was true prayer. My answer was to go to the gospel where Jesus says that "by their fruits you will know them." These fruits were abundant and showed me that this practice was indeed true prayer. After practicing mindfulness for a while, I would feel great calm and peace that, although not diminishing the pain, had a way of easing the stress of it. I learned to lay very still breathing slowly, not fighting the pain, but being attentive to it, accepting that I was in the only place I could be. How often I had told others of the gifts found in being fully present to the *now* moment! This was the time for me to practice it even though my *now* was not a pleasant or easy place to be.

Breathing in, I calm my body.

And so I continued to practice mindfulness and as I did, I began to be aware, in a way that is very hard to explain in words, of God's presence permeating all of me, a presence that seemed as if God was laying down next to me, holding me, experiencing the same pain with me. Although this sickness was in many ways an experience of total impotence, of total helplessness, it was also a new experience of God's presence in my life. I realized with a new kind of knowing

that there was nothing else and nowhere else that I could love or serve God better at that point. Mindfulness also offered me a way to learn detachment and surrender. Through this prayer I entered fully into God's will for me at this present moment, letting go of my desires to be someplace else, active, or efficient. Instead, I focused on responding to the reality of my life by being attuned to God's spirit in me and around me.

Later on, after this painful period was over, I learned to apply the lessons I had learned to other difficult situations. I found out that on days when I was feeling very tired or stressful, a new mindfulness prayer naturally developed that helped me not just to calm down, but to enter into a quiet union with God. This is the way I continue to practice it now. I sit with my eyes closed, my feet flat on the floor, and my hands open on my lap. I begin by asking for the grace to be open to God's presence followed by what I call my "breath prayer." As I breathe in and out, I imagine God's own breath breathing in me. Continuing this rhythm, I begin repeating a simple mantra such as:

Breathing in: "Loving God,"
Breathing out: "Breathe through me".

(Any short phrase that can easily fit the rhythm of your breath will do.) Whenever I find my mind wandering (very often at times!), instead of pushing away these distractions, I gently place them on my open hands and, mindfully, invite God's breath to touch them. I do not continue to pay attention to them, but I do not dismiss them either. It is a way to say to my concerns: "You are important, but at this time I will let God take care of you." This I do by gently, in a

way that does not even break the rhythm of the prayer, allowing them to be touched by God's grace coming through my own breath.

This is for me not just a method of prayer, but a celebration of God's presence in my life. This is where God finds me, not where I would like to be, but where I truly am. There I find God's gift of peace, of strength, and of true joy. "If you cannot find joy and peace in these very moments of sitting," says Thich Nhat Hanh in *Miracle of Mindfulness*, "then the future itself will only flow by as a river flows by, you will not be able to hold it back, you will be incapable of living the future when it has became the present. Joy and peace are the joy and peace possible in this very hour of sitting. If you cannot find it here, you won't find it anywhere." This *now* moment is truly God's holy ground where the fullness of God's grace waits for me.

Jerusalem

Tamir

Medieval skyline
and fax machines
crammed into the same courtyard.
It's always summer in this place,
sizzling hot, dusty white hot
even though it can be
the kind of cold
that pokes its icy fingers
into your bones
and chills your joints.
But it's always too hot
and the stones steam
under the olive trees.

And there's never
enough water
or green
or forgiveness.

A blazing moon leans on the rounded roof tops
the jackals howl
and the jasmine scent the air
as they always have done.
Parched throaty cries

rise like smoke,
a Babel of prayers.
Feet trample each other
scurrying to perform their rituals
with fundamental zeal.
Each with the only authentic
godly hookup
to a place on a hill,
a guarded dome,
a silent rock,
a crumbling wall
that has wept at
ancient battles
and modern combat.

In another dream
bathed in youthful stature
this same wall once stood west
in a kingly temple,
stooping over the centuries
its aging stone-skin
washed smooth
by tearful supplication.

Jerusalem
our shared cradle
of stored secrets.
And still the fight goes on
because the city of peace
has no peace.
The dueling duo
of testing and mirroring
are locked in a biblical embrace,
the old feud
rises like a dagger.

When those who stake this turf
sing each others' worship

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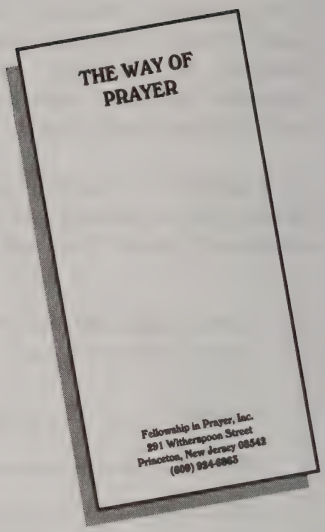


* * * * * * *

Please use this space to tell us your thoughts about this publication, *Sacred Journey.*

and carry their neighbor's burden
up the steps
of the Via Dolorosa
down the Dome of the Rock
and around the Wall,
no longer wailing in isolation
but praising the collective memory
and sounding out
the bells in unison,
maybe then . . .

Maybe then
the cauldron heat
will simmer down
and the twisting alleys
lead us out of the crooked maze.

Tamir is an actress and dancer from Israel. Her current production is Poetry for Peace/On Prayer, *an interfaith program of prayers from around the world.*

A TRANSFORMING EXPERIENCE

A Sacred Juxtaposition

Joseph A. Burkart

One prickly Maine day when the air was cool and the sun shining and the sea sparkling, I spent a day listening to Joan Halifax, Buddhist teacher and founder of the Being with Dying program. The local hospice brought her to my rural section of coastal Maine. As sailboats paraded through Eggemoggin Reach in the distance, Joan ascended her pillow surrounded by flowers, assumed a lotus position, and we were off on a five hour magical venture.

Joan spoke without notes, her head and heart integrated. She shared the experience of her work with dying people and with death row inmates in the New Mexico prison system. She led us in awareness work, instructing that, "We are guests on another's sacred journey." She then led us in exercises on "seeing the Buddha nature in the other."

I headed home inspired and was resolved to engage less in projection and judgements about others. I also

Joseph "Tony" Burkart is in private practice in "contemplative psychotherapy" and spiritual direction. He lives with his wife and son on a small farm on the coast of Maine. He is a Roman Catholic lay person and a Camaldolese Benedictine Oblate interested in the interplay between Zen practice and contemplative Christianity. He describes himself as a "clumsy contemplative!"

vowed to detach from old bitterness and grief that still informed my everyday actions.

Three days later, the musical group my son plays in had a concert at a local arts festival in a small coastal village. We arrived mid-morning to set up for the noon performance. We unloaded drums, guitars, amplifiers, cords, jacks and quickly assembled the set and the tuning process began.

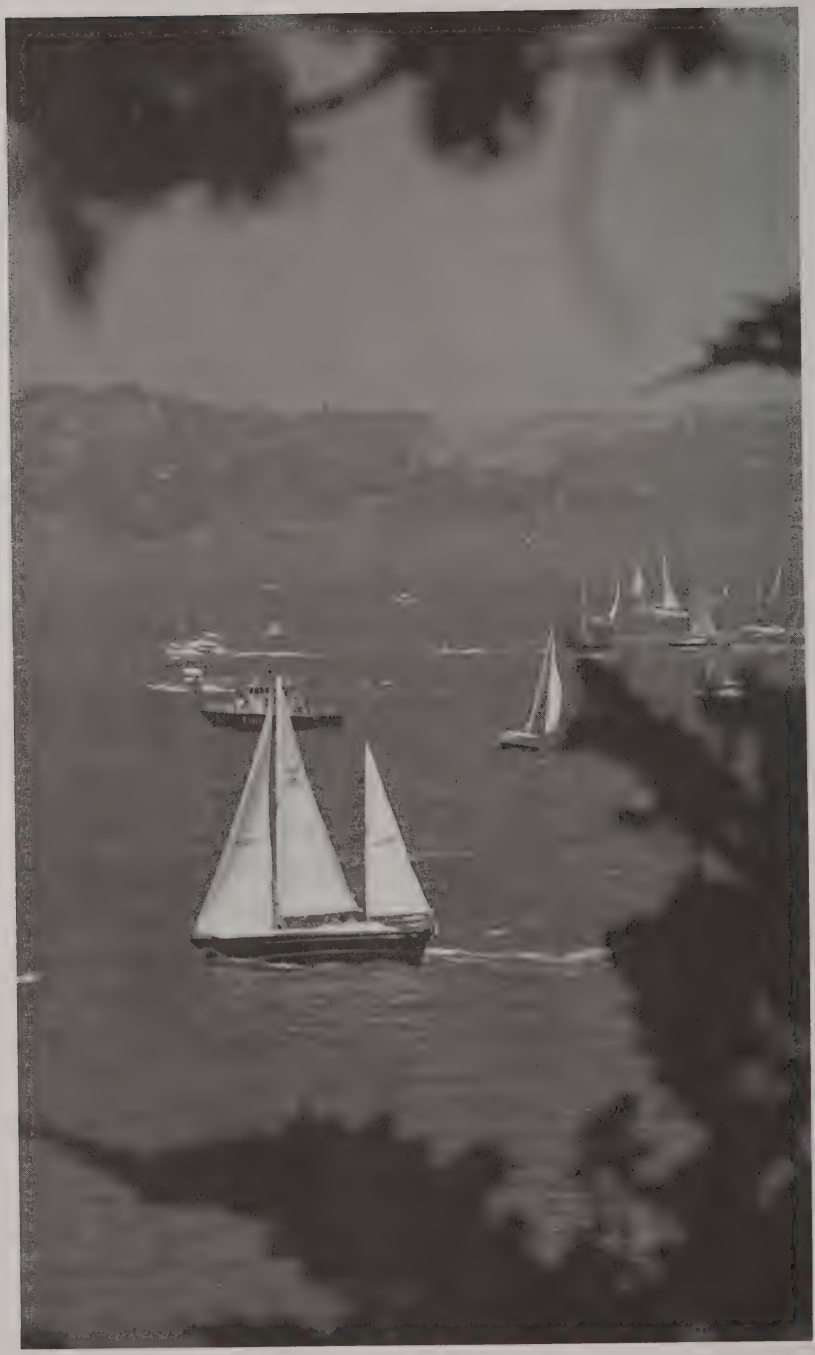
About ten minutes into the cacophony, a huge male figure in a bathrobe appeared from behind the next stage furiously sputtering, "This noise has to stop." He had worked all night and said he wouldn't make noise at midnight at our houses. He claimed he would call the police if the noise didn't stop. At this point the woman in charge of the festival swooped in and invited the man to accompany her to the police station to settle the matter. They briskly marched off.

Fifteen minutes later, the bellicose gentleman returned. I asked him if an agreement had been negotiated. He said, "No, I'll just have to come over and shoot the kids!"

The drummer's dad and I looked at each other with horror and we decided to step next door and speak with the constabulary ourselves. The police professionally assured us that they knew this individual and that nothing would come of his threats. This offered cold comfort. The constable eventually suggested that he would come by every fifteen minutes to make sure all was well.

My anxiety level did not abate. I backed my truck up to where I had one eye on the angry man's house and the other on the performing stage. I lowered the tailgate, plunked myself on it holding a can of mace in one hand and a baseball bat in the other.

As I sat with weapons in both hands, a question arose



Robert F. Campbell

in me with astounding volume and clarity: "Are you looking for the Buddha nature now?" I started to laugh. Then my amusement turned to hilarity as the officer made his synchronized rounds. I'm sure he thought he might need to keep an eye on the man who had made the threat and another on me in case I needed transport to the local psychiatric facility.

God not only has a sense of humor but has exquisite timing. God's uncanny ways bring us up short and mandate we look at the worst in ourselves. Then the transformative process begins.

Nietzsche claimed he "wanted his truth bloody." Perhaps it is in those moments when we see the unvarnished truth of who we really are and not what we imagine ourselves to be that the seeds of authentic inner growth are planted.

ON REMAINING THE SAME

Mary K. Vineyard

I once knew a family, eccentric by any standards, oddballs, idealistic, even utopian. And although they had the courage—and the compulsion—to live outside the conventional standards, they were subject to the same self-doubt and questioning that most healthy humans feel from time to time. So I was amused when I saw on one of their kitchen walls a quote from that famous man, Popeye. The sign said: *I Yam What I Yam!* I took it as a gesture of both defiance and reassurance.

Indeed, Popeye's philosophy may be the bottom line in human experience. Putting aside all postmodern discourse about the ever-changing nature of reality and the Buddhist wisdom of no-self, most of us, in fact, discover, sometimes to our dismay, that we simply are what we are. We don't change that much from cradle to grave, no matter how many years we spend in therapy, twelve-step meetings, spiritual direction, or institutions, whether they be educational, religious, or correctional. If we are lucky, we find ways to become less of a burden to others and less of a nuisance to ourselves, but ultimately

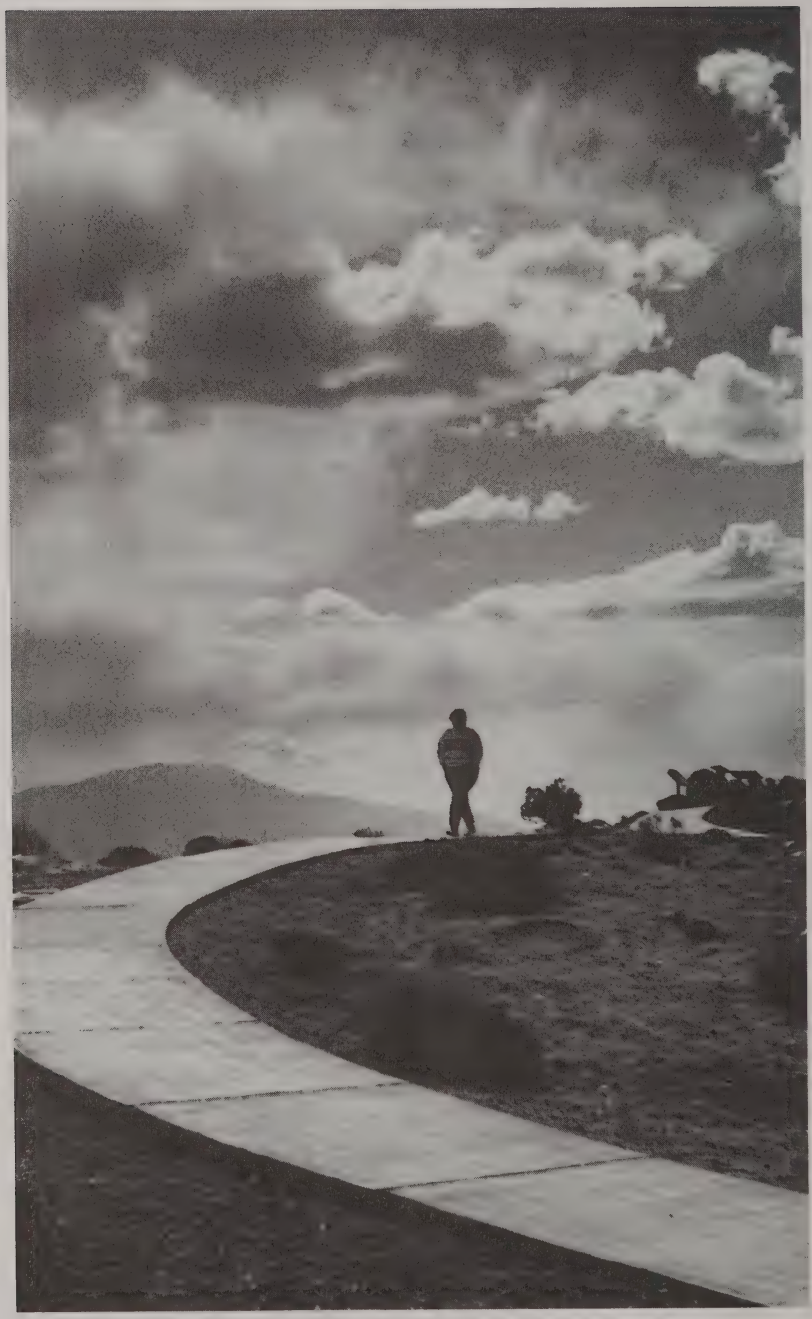
Mary Vineyard writes regularly for Radical Grace, *the newsletter of the Center for Action and Contemplation in New Mexico. A selection of her writing also was published last year in* Prayers for a Thousand Years *edited by Elizabeth Roberts and Elias Amidon.*

the ninety-year-old can say, "I don't feel much different from when I was sixteen."

We sometimes experience this as a problem since, just as our birthmarks, moles, and freckles keep reappearing, no matter how many million times our skin replaces itself, so too do our neuroses, habits, predispositions, automatic responses, and aversions seem to be bred in the bone, genetically set, as persistently singular and personal as our fingerprints. Each of us seems to carry, or actually to *be*, a unique energy signature, an almost infinite bundle of single traits combined in a fashion never seen before and absolutely unrepeatable. It's a marvelous fact, except that also bred into the human code, to one degree or another, is a tendency toward judgement, criticism comparison, and an irresistible urge to improve or at the very least to change whatever is given.

This tension between our essential nature and our desire to be different may be the territory of original sin and original grace. This conflict creates a vortex from which all movement takes place. We spiral through life, trying desperately to become better, stronger, smarter, prettier, more successful, kinder, calmer, richer–and we do exhibit apparent external changes. We stop acting out an addiction. We learn to control a reactive temper. We earn an advanced degree. We get elected to prominent office. We write a great novel. We win a prize. We have plastic surgery. And in the end, when we are alone with ourselves, and when we fall back into the arms of God, we have to admit that we have not changed. After everything, still, we hate what we have always hated; we love what we have always loved; we do what we have always done. We are what we are.

To those of us for whom guilt and self-accusation are



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a part of the original recipe (that's most of us, I suspect) this fact can be troubling. Does this mean there is no hope? Does it mean I should quit trying? Is life pointless, a cruel, futile game? No, I think it only means that there is far more of the divine stamp upon us than we know. There is some purposive, even joyful reason for the incredible diversity of life on earth. The way you twitch your eyebrow or cry at sentimental movies or crave hot fudge sundaes is as important as the particular color of the first rose that blooms in your garden in the summer or the exact arrangement of the clouds at sunset on the evening when you are walking through a favorite landscape with a heavy heart. The point is that everything matters. It all fits together, even your flaws, even your sins, even your trying to overcome them, even your failing to do so.

It matters, not because it is all predestined, but because it is not. It matters because every single turn of the kaleidoscope creates a new, wonderful picture and by some miraculous privilege, we are allowed to be a part of that picture, that creation. To be standing here now, breathing, seeing, thinking, is so beyond all likelihood, so incredible that the only sane response is to give ourselves over to it, laughing, understanding at some level that this moment is perfect, in a way that we would never be able to conjure even if we could make all those changes we try so pitifully to make.

Looking deeply, I think that the quote in my friends kitchen was not just from Popeye, but from a far more ancient source, the one whose essence is the ultimate I AM–the one who prods and teases and encourages all of creation, ourselves included, to stand up inside the wonder of existence with a full-hearted declaration of acceptance.

The Way of the Snow Leopard

Elizabeth M. Racicot

Even after many years of prayer and meditation, God still surprises and catches me unaware. I had one of those surprising visits during a recent thirty-day silent retreat. In the year before the retreat I had begun writing and publishing creative non-fiction and felt a joy that I didn't feel in my job. I wondered if I wanted to write full time and risk letting go of my successful career. I prayed for direction and all I seemed to hear Jesus say was that I would find a deeper sense of community if I kept the poor close to my heart. I didn't know what that meant. I hoped that time away in prayer would shed light on how God was calling me.

The most significant moment of the retreat came not in the hours of prayer and reflection on the scriptures or in the daily discussions with my director, but in a compelling and unusual dream. It is the kind of dream that C.G. Jung

Elizabeth M. Racicot is an independent writer on spiritual, religious, and social justice issues, as well as a web page designer and computer consultant. She and her husband live in upstate New York where they are involved in ministry through St. Mary's Catholic Community of Crescent.

calls a "big" dream because it draws on a mythological motif that has to do with what "has not yet come into existence but is still in the process of becoming."

I dreamed that I was being pursued by a snow leopard.

Now most of what I know about snow leopards comes from reading Peter Matthiessen's 1978 bestseller *The Snow Leopard*. The author journeys to Nepal and climbs the Himalayas in search of this rare creature whom he describes as a most beautiful member of the cat family with "pale frosty eyes and a coat of pale misty gray." It lives in the high peaks of the Central Asian mountains and has hardly ever been seen in the wild by a human. The journey to its habitat is dangerous and difficult.

About halfway through the book, Matthiessen describes a conversation with the zoologist George Schaller, his traveling companion whom he calls GS:

> By firelight, we talk about the snow leopard. Not only is it rare, so says GS, but it is wary and elusive to a magical degree, and so well camouflaged in the places it chooses to lie that one can stare straight at it from yards away and fail to see it.

Matthiessen never does see a snow leopard and seems to graciously accept his disappointment: "That the snow leopard is, that it is here, that its frosty eyes watch us from the mountain–that is enough." The snow leopard emerged for me as a powerful symbol of the search for the spirit of God that endows our lives with courage, beauty, and mystery.

The evening before my dream, I listened to a homily by Bill Devine, a Jesuit retreat director, on the attractiveness of Jesus and the danger and difficulty of following him. Bill quoted from the Jesuit writer William Barry:

> The disciples are in the presence of a man with immense energy and intensity, a man of great compassion for the sick and suffering, a man who reaches out to the poor and the outcast, a man of prayer, a man from whom evil spirits recoil in horror, a man for whom people and their needs for compassion and love come before laws. He is wondrously attractive.

I savored this description of Jesus and remember saying to myself, "Yes, he is wondrously attractive and I'd follow him anywhere." But Bill went on to say that Jesus is dangerous and difficult to follow.

We see the danger when Jesus tells his disciples what they are to do when they are arrested. Bill reminded us, Jesus doesn't say "If you are arrested, but when you are arrested." I thought about the many priests, nuns, and lay people who have been arrested, tortured and killed in the fight for social justice in Latin America.

We see the difficulty in following Jesus when we recount his words to the rich young man, "Sell what you have and give to the poor, and . . . then come, follow me."

That night *I dreamed that I was in the country, staying at a house built into the side of a mountain. Toward the top of the mountain was a summer cabin. It was early morning and it had snowed heavily through the night. Everything was covered in white. I began walking through the snow and suddenly I saw a snow leopard in the distance. I became afraid and quickly headed for the cabin. Just as I got to the door, I turned and saw that the leopard was almost at my heels. I knew that I could get into the cabin safely, but it had no food, clothes, or heat. I felt trapped. Suddenly the thought crossed my mind that, instead of running, I could stand my ground*

and the snow leopard would not harm me. For a brief second I wondered if I was courageous enough to do that, and then I awoke. Immediately I thought about Matthiessen's book and about the Jesus that Bill Devine described the day before.

I see Jesus symbolized in the snow leopard–a Jesus whose spirit is free to go anywhere God calls, who is "dazzling as light" as the disciples witness in the transfiguration, and who is a source of great power and strength. And, like the snow leopard, he is difficult for us to see and dangerous to follow, but always there watching and waiting. As the retreat went on, the snow leopard image worked its way into my heart. I kept imagining its beauty and the splendor of the places where it lives. I thought about how hard it would be to get to those places. But mostly I thought about the end of the dream–the idea of standing still and letting the snow leopard approach. I prayed about the dream and new images came to mind.

The snow leopard is a powerful symbol of the search for the spirit of God.

I am standing on the worn path between the house and the summer cabin. The snow leopard approaches. I feel my fear but I stand my ground. The snow leopard moves behind me and begins to nudge me off the worn path. As I go, I make fresh tracks in the snow. Then the snow leopard walks beside me–quiet, gentle, and slow. If I stop, it nudges me along again. As I reflected on these images, I realized the importance of letting go of my fear and of trusting in my most inner voice if I am to follow where God is leading.

Since the retreat, I have made a few changes and decisions. I exchanged my full-time job for a part-time one so I can spend half of my time on writing. My

husband and I have made a retreat to Cuernavaca, Mexico with the Benedictine Sisters of Mexico. We experienced the culture of the indigenous people and the life of the poor. We returned only to deepen our involvement with community and family, and to embrace a deeper intimacy with each other. And the visions of the snow leopard continue.

I find it hard to fully embrace the call behind these visions—the call to follow an unseen God to an unknown destination, to travel by the light of faith, with no map, no guarantee it will work out, and no way to control the outcome. For me, that call means following the way of the snow leopard into the unknown and uncharted experiences of community and creativity.

Sabbath As An Act of Resistance

Lee Van Ham

During a one-day October retreat, Marjory Bankson, leader of Faith at Work and a Fellowship in Prayer advisor, led a small community of us in reflection and interaction, contrasting ways of working that wearied the soul with those that restored it. She used Jesus' invitation to his disciples to come apart and rest (Mark 7:30-44). Together we treasured this day of Sabbath. Our schedules had argued against it. We knew we had "stolen" it from powers that often dictate in our lives.

When I heard someone say how we had to "steal" this day, a host of thoughts connected with the word Sabbath awoke in me. Sabbath is not just a day in the week but is alternative time. Time for rest. Rest that ceases from the activity of productivity. Yet, rest that actively seeks an

Lee Van Ham recently retired after more than thirty years in the Presbyterian ministry. He and his wife left the workforce with early retirement to join with three other households in an intentional community in Chicago, IL. Lee says, "Our desire is not for utopia, but for faithfulness. It's about arranging our lives so that God's call to 'do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God,' isn't just an add-on, but the homebase."

altered state of being in which God's presence is perceived and known. When in Sabbath, we find that presence within our own souls, our communities, and within all creation. Such time must be taken and treasured somewhere in every week.

How much time is needed for Sabbath? One-seventh of every week is a good, stretching, demanding, yet reasonable amount. Once we choose it, we must then build a hedge around it to protect it from almighty forces that already think this time is theirs. And why shouldn't they? We've been letting them have it.

Today few church people can make a compelling argument for the Sabbath. Most don't keep it or remember it. Many pooh-pooh it. The notion of Sabbath seems of little use in productive, utilitarian life. It's an anachronism. Very impractical. Quaint. We have little sense of how keeping the Sabbath resists injustice and liberates us from economic slavery in society.

Sabbath Resists Injustice in Society

In the days immediately following the retreat, I reveled in the thought of Sabbath as an act of justice, defying the systemic attack on rest and renewal for our souls. Keeping Sabbath is not only an act in the inner world where it restores my soul, it is also an act in the outer world where it resists injustice in society. Sabbath keeping is an act of resistance against the dominant way of living which is supported by a vast network of social systems. Our ways of living are focused on activity, not rest. In addition to our personal choices, we must open wide our eyes to the systems of our culture and work, which are so sinister about rest. The global economy doesn't want rest. It wants productivity–cheap and lots of it. Our economy is based

on consuming pricey goods to sustain economic growth. If we stop and rest we are not productive. And if our rest includes reflection on what is going on, we may break out of our addiction to buying, spending, grasping, gasping, and accumulating. More, more, more. "Stop!" says the Sabbath. Sabbath interrupts this money intoxication allowing time for detoxification and a new choice for sobriety. Sabbath speaks a word which is impossible to say when we are under the influence of materialism and money addiction, "Enough!"

My early experience of Sabbath did not reflect this invigorating, radical energy of protest. Sabbath was about restricting activity. Restricting play. I grew up in a monoethnic, Dutch community. Our small farm was four miles outside of Pella, Iowa, a town of 6,000 that was influenced by Dutch piety which held to a practice of Sabbath slowdown and shutdown. During my early experience of Sabbath keeping, renewal of the soul was less prominent in my thinking than prohibition of things I could enjoy doing. Being reborn to Sabbath keeping as an adult has added a new meaning, joy, and radical relevance to a practice from my boyhood.

"Steal" the day. Take back your time.

This new transforming understanding of Sabbath is related to the liberation of the early Hebrews from slavery of Egypt, the dominant economic and political power of that time. Egypt required constant work from the enslaved to keep the economy humming. In other words, slaves work seven days; God's liberated people work six and rest one. The Israelites were not to forget what the dominant economic system had done to them. "Six days you will

labor," God said, "but on the seventh, rest. Remember you were slaves in Egypt. Don't be enslaved again." The biblical idea of Sabbath was liberating, not restrictive. Slaves work as much as their masters and their economic systems dictate. God's liberated people rest one-seventh of the time to renew their souls. To stop productivity. To interact in community. To gather and celebrate and praise the God who is bigger than the system that would enslave us.

World capitalism today is once again enslaving many. The poor are enslaved by wages that do not sustain living. Countries are enslaved to debts they will never be able to pay. The wealthy are enslaved by needing to make ever more money in order to possess more and more things. Some slaves of the system live in cardboard huts, squatting on space they do not own or rent. Others, just as much slaves, live in mansions gobbling up acres to which they hold title. But in truth, what they possess, possesses them. This is the power of idolatry. The works of human hands become so desirable that people distort God's design for human life to own them. The owner becomes the owned. So we work and work and our souls become more and more weary. Exiled from us, our souls cry out, "Is there any rest?" And we must ask ourselves if we will forever quiet the voice that says "Enough."

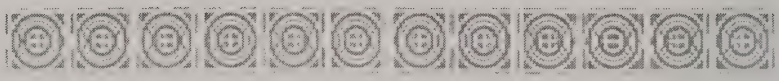
Sabbath Thrives in Intentional Communities

Left to ourselves the outlook for Sabbath keeping is not good. Sabbath is not something most of us can claim for ourselves. We need another, and then another. We need those few who willingly move away from the wearying pace and name the idolatry that drives it. We must turn to one another to be able to keep a covenant with God.

Find those few and come together and live.

If people of faith today reflect on God's instruction about the Sabbath, we will soon be forming communities of resistance. Once we take the legalism out of Sabbath keeping we can again come together to renew our souls. We will encourage one another to claim Sabbath time. We will have time to pray, retreat, reflect, and worship. Things will get squeezed out by Sabbath instead of the other way around. Work will be contained in six-sevenths of our time. With encouragement we will be able to utter the word "Enough." We will exhibit an alternative way in the world–a way of resistance that includes restorative, transforming rest.

PRAYERS



These prayers are from A Siddur for Erev Shabbat *compiled by Marcia Prager. Those who attended last June's "Companions on the Sacred Journey" conference experienced the beauty of this Shabbat service soulfully and joyously led by Rabbi Prager.*

A Prayer for the Night

Rabbi Lynne Gottlieb

Out of deep center
night passes through
gates open
seasons change
stars swirl on their eternal pathways
through the light
spins the glorious heavenly array
this too is the name of YHWH.
Living and Eternal until the end of time.

A Fountain of Blessing are You
Endless one
who blends the light of evening.

Source of All Blessings

Rabbi Richard Levy

Source of all Blessings are you, Adonay
Author of time and space
You bring on evening with a word,
You open heaven's gates with wisdom,
You adjust the ages with sensitive discernment,
You vary the seasons and order the orbits of a sky full of stars.

You create each day and night afresh,
roll light in front of darkness and darkness in front of light so gently,
that no moment is quite like the one before,
or after.

Second by second
You make day pass into night and night into day,
and You alone know the boundary point
dividing one from the other.

Unifier-of-All-Being is Your Name!
Timeless Power
Energize us forever!
You who brings in the evening
we praise.

The Amidah

Rabbis Mordecai Liebling & Devorah Bartnoff

The Shabbat Amidah has seven blessings which are memorized and softly chanted. Seven is the number of Shabbat: creation completed, creation fulfulled. The following prayer is from the seventh blessing, the blessing of shalom, wholeness, completeness, fulfillment, and peace.

Source of Shalom: Fulfillment and Peace
May we drink deeply from the fountain of peace,
Know peace in ourselves,
Live in peace with our neighbors,
Create peace in the world.
We bless the Holy One,
Creator of Wholeness, Source of Peace.

Marcia Prager is the spiritual leader of P'nai Or Princeton and P'nai Or Philadelphia. Both communities welcome visitors to their uniquely personal, celebratory, and participatory services. Both are members of the Network of Jewish Renewal Communities, an affiliated project of ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal. Jewish Renewal is a movement of people engaged in creating contemporary models of Jewish expression that speak to both intellect and heart in forms which embrace the full inclusion of women and the divine feminine, and which facilitate the deep healing of our relationships with each other and the earth. Locate the ALEPH website at www.ALEPHAJR.org to find out more about Jewish Renewal, and Jewish Renewal communities nationwide, in Canada and Europe.

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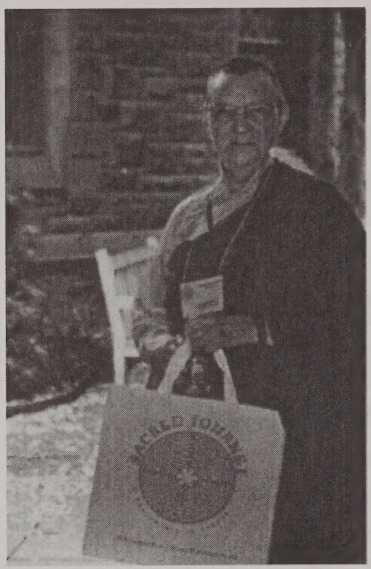

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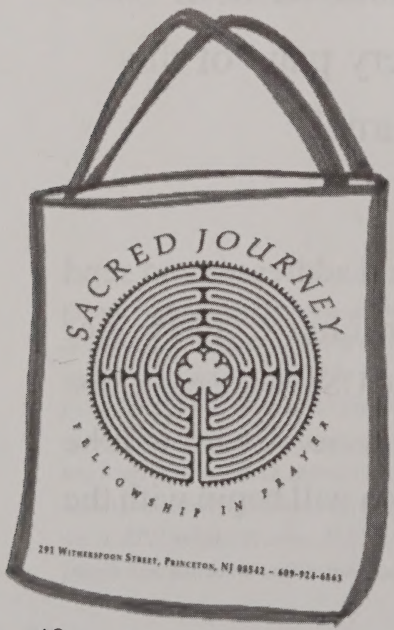

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